AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE

So the oarsmen rowed until the galley cast anchor beneath the city of Carthage, & ..... she called to mind that there she had been cherished

AUCASSIN & NICOLETTE

TRANSLATED FROM THE OLD FRENCH
BY EUGENE MASON

Aucassin et Nicolette

WITH COLOURED
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
MAXWELL ARMFIELD

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INTRODUCTION

The most lyric and lovely of early French romances is preserved to us by a single copy in the National Library of Paris. Without that one ill-written manuscript the world would have been poorer by how exquisite a dream! Had not this unique bloom remained, it would have been impossible to imagine that so rare and delicate a flower could have sprung in the unsheltered fields of mediæval France.

The author and the date of the famous cantefable are alike unknown. He speaks of himself at the beginning of his work as the "viel caitif." Some have considered, therefore, that the writer was an old soldier, escaped from amongst the Saracens. But the words translated "agèd captive" might mean just as reasonably "the unfortunate old man"—one who was rather the prisoner of life. Only this seems sure—that the author of *Aucassin and Nicolette* was a professional minstrel, and one who no longer rejoiced in his youth.

The date of the romance is of little more certainty than the authorship. A famous scholar places it as early as 1130, in the reign of Louis VII ; others ascribe it to the following century. Few things are certain in this world, but it seems reasonably safe to say that *Aucassin and Nicolette* was composed at the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century, and to say nothing more.

The dialect in which *Aucassin* is written is that of the Ile de France or Picardy. The scene of the story, however, is laid in Provence, in the great castle of Beaucaire, overlooking the rushing Rhone, and the full-blown sentiments of the hero breathe easily enough the languid atmosphere of the troubadours.

For if the name of the writer be lost, and the date of his birth unknown, his work must ever remain, because in it he has caged his dream of love, and has revealed so delicate a sense of beauty, as would not have seemed possible to a strolling player of mediæval France.

E. M.

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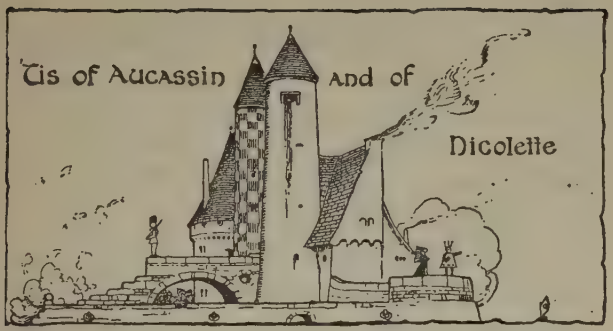
Aucassin and Nicolette

Who will deign to hear the song
Solace of a captive's wrong,
Telling how two children met,
Aucassin and Nicolette ;
How by grievous pains distraught,
Noble deeds the varlet wrought
For his love, and her bright face !
Sweet my rhyme, and full of grace,
Fair my tale, and debonair.
He who lists—though full of care,
Sore astonied, much amazed,
All cast down, by men mispraised,
Sick in body, sick in soul,
Hearing shall be glad and whole,
So sweet the tale.



Now they say and tell and relate:

How the Count Bougars of Valence made war on Count Garin of Beaucaire, war so great, so wonderful, and so mortal, that never dawned the day but that he was at the gates and walls and barriers of the town, with a hundred knights and ten thousand men-at-arms, on foot and on horse. So he burned the Count's land, and spoiled his heritage, and dealt death to his men. The Count Garin of Beaucaire was full of years, and frail ; he had long outworn his day. He had no heir,

neither son nor daughter, save one only varlet, and he was such as I will tell you. Aucassin was the name of the lad. Fair he was, and pleasant to look upon, tall and shapely of body in every whit of him. His hair was golden, and curled in little rings about his head ; he had grey and dancing eyes, a clear, oval face, a nose high and comely, and he was so gracious in all good graces that nought in him was found to blame, but good alone. But Love, that high prince, so utterly had cast him down, that he cared not to become knight, neither to bear arms, nor to tilt at tourneys, nor yet to do aught that it became his name to do.

His father and his mother spake him thus—

"Son, don now thy mail, mount thy horse, keep thy land, and render aid to thy men. Should they see thee amongst them the better will the men-at-arms defend their bodies and their substance, thy fief and mine."

"Father," said Aucassin, "why speakest thou in such fashion to me? May

God give me nothing of my desire if I become knight, or mount to horse, or thrust into the press to strike other or be smitten down, save only that thou give me Nicolette, my sweet friend, whom I love so well."

"Son," answered the father, "this may not be. Put Nicolette from mind. For Nicolette is but a captive maid, come hither from a far country, and the Viscount of this town bought her with money from the Saracens, and set her in this place. He hath nourished and baptized her, and held her at the font. On a near day he will give her to some young bachelor, who will gain her bread in all honour. With this what hast thou to do? Ask for a wife, and I will find thee the daughter of a king, or a count. Were he the richest man in France his daughter shalt thou have, if so thou wilt."

"Faith, my father," said Aucassin, "what honour of all this world would not Nicolette, my very sweet friend, most richly become! Were she Empress of Byzantium or of Allemaigne, or Queen of

France or England, low enough would be her degree, so noble is she, so courteous and debonair, and gracious in all good graces."

Now is sung:

Aucassin was of Beaucaire,
Of the mighty castle there,
But his heart was ever set
On his fair friend, Nicolette,
Small he heeds his father's blame,
Or the harsh words of his dame.
" *Fool, to weep the livelong day,*
Nicolette trips light and gay.
Scouring she from far Carthàge,
Bought of Paynims for a wage.
Since a wife beseems thee good
Take a wife of wholesome blood."
" *Mother, naught for this I care,*
Nicolette is debonair;
Slim the body, fair the face,
Make my heart a lighted place;
Love has set her as my peer,
Too sweet, my dear."

Now they say and tell and relate:

When the Count Garin of Beaucaire found that in nowise could he withdraw Aucassin his son from the love of Nicolette, he sought out the Viscount of the town, who was his man, and spake him thus—

"Sir Count, send Nicolette your god-child straightly from this place. Cursed be the land wherefrom she was carried to this realm; for because of her I lose Aucassin, who will not become knight, nor do aught that it becometh knight to do. Know well that were she once within my power I would hurry her to the fire; and look well to yourself, for you stand in utmost peril and fear."

"Sire," answered the Viscount, "this lies heavy upon me, that ever Aucassin goes and he comes seeking speech with my ward. I have bought her with my money, and nourished and baptized her, and held her at the font. Moreover, I am fain to give her to some young bachelor, who will gain her bread in all honour. With this Aucassin your son had nought to do. But since this is your

will and your pleasure, I will send her to so far a country that nevermore shall he see her with his eyes."

"Walk warily," replied the Count Garin, "for great evil easily may fall to you of this."

So they went their ways.

Now the Viscount was a very rich man, and had a rich palace standing within a garden. In a certain chamber of an upper floor he set Nicolette in ward, with an old woman to bear her company, and to watch; and he put there bread and meat and wine and all things for their need. Then he placed a seal upon the door, so that none might enter in, nor issue forth, save only that there was a window looking on the garden, strict and close, whereby they breathed a little fresh air.

Now is sung:

Nicolette is prisoned fast,
In a vaulted chamber cast,
Shaped and carven wondrous well,
Painted as by miracle.
At the marble casement stayed

the GARDEN FROM her ROOM
she MIGHT see the ROSES BLOM

On her elbow leaned the maid;
Golden showed her golden hair,
Softly curved her eyebrows rare,
Fair her face, and brightly flushed,
Sweeter maiden never blushed.
In the garden from her room
She might watch the roses bloom,
Hear the birds make tender moan;
Then she knew herself alone.
"'Lack, great pity 'tis to place
Maid in such an evil case.
Aucassin, my liege, my squire,
Friend, and dear, and heart's desire,
Since thou dost not hate me quite
Men have done me foul despite,
Sealed me in this vaulted room,
Thrust me to this bitter doom.
But by God, Our Lady's Son,
Soon will I from here begone,
So it be won."

Now they say and tell and relate:

Nicolette was prisoned in the chamber, as you have heard and known. The cry and the haro went through all the land that Nicolette was stolen away. Some

said that she had fled the country, and some that the Count Garin of Beaucaire had done her to death. Whatever man may have rejoiced, Aucassin had no joy therein, so he sought out the Viscount of the town and spake him thus—

"Sir Viscount, what have you done with Nicolette, my very sweet friend, the thing that most I love in all the world? Have you borne her off, or hidden her from my sight? Be sure that should I die hereof, my blood will be required of you, as is most just, for I am slain of your two hands, since you steal from me the thing that most I love in all the world."

"Fair sire," answered the Viscount, "put this from mind. Nicolette is a captive maid whom I brought here from a far country. For her price I trafficked with the Saracens, and I have bred and baptized her, and held her at the font. I have nourished her duly, and on a day will give her to some young bachelor who will gain her bread in honourable fashion. With this you have nought to do; but only to wed the daughter of some count or king. Beyond this, what profit would you have,

had you become her lover, and taken her to your bed? Little enough would be your gain therefrom, for your soul would lie tormented in Hell all the days of all time, so that to Paradise never should you win."

"In Paradise what have I to do? I care not to enter, but only to have Nicolette, my very sweet friend, whom I love so dearly well. For into Paradise go none but such people as I will tell you of. There go those aged priests, and those old cripples, and the maimed, who all day long and all night cough before the altars, and in the crypts beneath the churches; those who go in worn old mantles and old tattered habits; who are naked, and barefoot, and full of sores; who are dying of hunger and of thirst, of cold and of wretchedness. Such as these enter in Paradise, and with them have I nought to do. But in Hell will I go. For to Hell go the fair clerks and the fair knights who are slain in the tourney and the great wars, and the stout archer and the loyal man. With them will I go. And there go the fair and courteous ladies, who have friends, two or three, together with their wedded

lords. And there pass the gold and the silver, the ermine and all rich furs, harpers and minstrels, and the happy of the world. With these will I go, so only that I have Nicolette, my very sweet friend, by my side."

"Truly," cried the Viscount, "you talk idly, for never shall you see her more; yea, and if perchance you spoke together, and your father heard thereof, he would burn both me and her in one fire, and yourself might well have every fear."

"This lies heavy upon me," answered Aucassin.

Thus he parted from the Viscount making great sorrow.

Now is sung:

Aucassin departed thus
Sad at heart and dolorous ;
Gone is she his fairest friend,
None may comfort give or mend,
None by counsel make good end.
To the palace turned he home,
Climbed the stair, and sought his room.
In the chamber all alone
Bitterly he made his moan,
Presently began to weep
For the love he might not keep.
" *Nicolette, so gent, so sweet,*
Fair the faring of thy feet,
Fair thy laughter, sweet thy speech,
Fair our playing each with each,
Fair thy clasping, fair thy kiss,
Yet it endeth all in this.
Since from me my love is ta'en
I misdoubt that I am slain ;
Sister, sweet friend."

MA

Now they say and tell and relate:

Whilst Aucassin was in the chamber lamenting Nicolette, his friend, the Count Bougars of Valence, wishful to end the war, pressed on his quarrel, and setting his pikemen and horsemen in array, drew near the castle to take it by storm. Then the cry arose, and the tumult; and the knights and the men-at-arms took their weapons, and hastened to the gates and the walls to defend the castle, and the burgesses climbed to the battlements, flinging quarrels and sharpened darts upon the foe. Whilst the siege was so loud and perilous the Count Garin of Beaucaire sought the

chamber where Aucassin lay mourning, assotted upon Nicolette, his very sweet friend, whom he loved so well.

"Ha, son," cried he, "craven art thou and shamed, that seest thy best and fairest castle so hardly beset. Know well that if thou lose it thou art a naked man. Son, arm thyself lightly, mount to horse, keep thy land, aid thy men, hurtle into the press. Thou needest not to strike another, neither to be smitten down, but if they see thee amongst them, the better will they defend their goods and their bodies, thy land and mine. And thou art so stout and strong that very easily thou canst do this thing, as is but right."

"Father," answered Aucassin, "what sayest thou now? May God give me nought that I require of Him if I become knight, or mount to horse, or thrust into the press to strike knight or be smitten down, save only thou givest me Nicolette, my sweet friend, whom I love so well."

"Son," replied the father, "this can never be. Rather will I suffer to lose my

OUR GARIN OF BEAUCAIRE SOUGHT THE CHAMBER WHERE AUCASSIN LAY MOURNING: ASSOTTED UPON NICOLETTE

heritage, and go bare of all, than that thou shouldest have her, either as woman or as dame."

So he turned without farewell. But when Aucassin saw him part he stayed him, saying—

"Father, come now, I will make a true bargain with thee."

"What bargain, fair son?"

"I will arm me, and thrust into the press on such bargain as this, that if God bring me again safe and sound, thou wilt let me look on Nicolette, my sweet friend, so long that I may have with her two words or three, and kiss her one only time."

"I pledge my word to this," said the father.

Of this covenant had Aucassin much joy.

Now is sung:

Aucassin the more was fain
Of the kiss he sought to gain,
Rather than his coffers hold
A hundred thousand marks of gold.

At the call his squire drew near,
Armed him fast in battle gear;
Shirt and hauberk donned the lad,
Laced the helmet on his head,
Girt his golden-hilted sword,
Came the war-horse at his word,
Gripped the buckler and the lance,
At the stirrups cast a glance;
Then most brave from plume to heel
Pricked the charger with the steel,
Called to mind his absent dear,
Passed the gateway without fear
Straight to the fight.

Now they say and tell and relate:

Aucassin was armed and horsed as you have heard. God! how bravely showed the shield about his neck, the helmet on his head, and the fringes of the baldric upon his left thigh. The lad was tall and strong, slender and comely to look upon, and the steed he bestrode was great and speedy, and fiercely had he charged clear of the gate. Now think not that he sought spoil of oxen and cattle, nor to smite others and himself escape. Nay, but

of all this he took no heed. Another was with him, and he thought so dearly upon Nicolette, his fair friend, that the reins fell from his hand, and he struck never a blow. Then the charger, yet smarting from the spur, bore him into the battle, amidst the thickest of the foe, so that hands were laid upon him from every side, and he was made prisoner. Thus they spoiled him of shield and lance, and forthwith led him from the field a captive, questioning amongst themselves by what death he should be slain. When Aucassin marked their words,

"Ha, God," cried he, "sweet Creature, these are my mortal foes who lead me captive, and who soon will strike off my head; and when my head is smitten, never again may I have fair speech with Nicolette, my sweet friend, whom I hold so dear. Yet have I a good sword, and my horse is yet unblown. Now if I defend me not for her sake, may God keep her never, should she love me still."

The varlet was hardy and stout, and the charger he bestrode was right fierce. He

plucked forth his sword, and smote suddenly on the right hand and on the left, cutting sheer through nasal and headpiece, gauntlet and arm, making such ruin around him as the wild boar deals when brought to bay by hounds in the wood ; until he had struck down ten knights, and hurt seven more, and won clear of the *mêlée*, and rode back at utmost speed, sword in hand.

The Count Bougars of Valence heard tell that his men were about to hang Aucassin, his foe, in shameful wise, so he hastened to the sight, and Aucassin passed him not by. His sword was yet in hand, and he struck the Count so fiercely upon the helm, that the headpiece was cleft and shattered upon the head. So bewildered was he by the stroke that he tumbled to the ground, and Aucassin stretched forth his hand, and took him, and led him captive by the nasal of the helmet, and delivered him to his father.

"Father," said Aucassin, "behold the foe who wrought such war and mischief upon you ! Twenty years hath this war

endured, and none was there to bring it to an end."

"Fair son," replied his father, "better are such deeds as these than foolish dreams."

"Father," returned Aucassin, "preach me no preachings; but carry out our bargain."

"Ha, what bargain, fair son?"

"How now, father, hast thou returned from the market? By my head, I will remember, whosoever may forget; so close is it to my heart. Didst thou not bargain with me when I armed me and fared into the press, that if God brought me again safe and sound, thou wouldst grant me sight of Nicolette, my sweet friend, so long that I might have with her two words or three, and kiss her once? Such was the bargain, so be thou honest dealer."

"I," cried the father, "God aid me never should I keep such terms. Were she here I would set her in the flames, and thou thyself might well have every fear."

"Is this the very end?" said Aucassin.

"So help me God," said his father; "yea."

"Certes," said Aucassin, "grey hairs go ill with a lying tongue."

"Count of Valence," said Aucassin, "thou art my prisoner?"

"Sire," answered the Count, "it is verily and truly so."

"Give me thy hand," said Aucassin.

"Sire, as you wish."

So each took the other's hand.

"Plight me thy faith," said Aucassin, "that so long as thou drawest breath, never shall pass a day but thou shalt deal with my father in shameful fashion, either in goods or person, if so thou canst!"

"Sire, for God's love make me not a jest, but name me a price for my ransom. Whether you ask gold or silver, steed or palfrey, pelt or fur, hawk or hound, it shall be paid."

"What!" said Aucassin; "art thou not my prisoner?"

"Truly, sire," said the Count Bougars.

"God aid me never," quoth Aucassin, "but I send thy head flying, save thou plight me such faith as I said."

"In God's name," cried he, "I plight such affiance as seems most meet to thee."

He pledged his troth, so Aucassin set him upon a horse, and brought him into a place of surety, himself riding by his side.

Now is sung:

When Count Garin knew his son
Aucassin still loved but one,
That his heart was ever set
Fondly on fond Nicolette;
Straight a prison he hath found,
Paved with marble, walled around,
Where in vault beneath the earth
Aucassin made little mirth,
But with wailing filled his cell
In such wise as now I tell.
"Nicolette, white lily-flow'r,
Sweetest lady found in bow'r;
Sweet as grape that brimmeth up
Sweetness in the spicèd cup.
On a day this chanced to you;
Out of Limousin there drew

One, a pilgrim, sore adread,
Lay in pain upon his bed,
Tossed, and took with fear his breath,
Very dolent, near to death.
Then you entered, pure and white,
Softly to the sick man's sight,
Raised the train that swept adown,
Raised the ermine-bordered gown,
Raised the smock, and bared to him
Daintily each lovely limb.
Then a wondrous thing befell,
Straight he rose up sound and well,
Left his bed, took cross in hand,
Sought again his own dear land.
Lily-flow'r, so white, so sweet,
Fair the faring of thy feet,
Fair thy laughter, fair thy speech,
Fair our playing each with each.
Sweet thy kisses, soft thy touch,
All must love thee over much.
'Tis for thee that I am thrown
In this vaulted cell alone,
'Tis for thee that I attend
Death, that comes to make an end,
For thee, sweet friend."

How they say and tell and relate:

Aucassin was set in prison as you have heard tell, and Nicolette for her part was shut in the chamber. It was in the time of summer heat, in the month of May, when the days are warm, long and clear, and the nights coy and serene. Nicolette lay one night sleepless on her bed, and watched the moon shine brightly through the casement, and listened to the nightingale plain in the garden. Then she bethought her of Aucassin, her friend, whom she loved so well. She called also to mind the Count Garin of Beaucaire, her mortal foe, and feared greatly to remain lest her hiding-place should be told to him, and she be put to death in some shameful fashion. She made certain that the old woman who held her in ward was sound asleep. So she rose, and wrapped herself in a very fair silk mantle, the best she had, and taking the sheets from her bed and the towels of her bath, knotted them together to make so long a rope as she was able, tied it about a pillar of the window, and slipped down into

the garden. Then she took her skirt in both hands, the one before, and the other behind, and kilted her lightly against the dew which lay thickly upon the grass, and so passed through the garden. Her hair was golden, with little love-locks ; her eyes blue and laughing ; her face most dainty to see, with lips more vermeil than ever was rose or cherry in the time of summer heat ; her teeth white and small ; her breasts so firm that they showed beneath her vesture like two rounded nuts ; so frail was she about the girdle that your two hands could have spanned her, and the daisies that she brake with her feet in passing, showed altogether black against her instep and her flesh, so white was the fair young maiden.

She came to the postern, and unbarring the gate, issued forth upon the streets of Beaucaire, taking heed to keep within the shadows, for the moon shone very bright, and thus she fared until she chanced upon the tower where her lover was prisoned. The tower was buttressed with pieces of wood in many places, and

Nicolette hid herself amongst the pillars, wrapped close in her mantle. She set her face to a crevice of the tower, which was old and ruinous, and there she heard Aucassin weeping within, making great sorrow for the sweet friend whom he held so dear; and when she had hearkened awhile she began to speak.

Now is sung:

Nicolette, so bright of face,
Leaned within this buttressed place,
Heard her lover weep within,
Marked the woe of Aucassin.
Then in words her thought she told,
"Aucassin, fond heart and bold,
What avails thine heart should ache
For a Paynim maiden's sake.
Ne'er may she become thy mate,
Since we prove thy father's hate,
Since thy kinsfolk hate me too;
What for me is left to do?
Nothing, but to seek the strand,
Pass o'er sea to some far land."
Shore she then one golden tress,
Thrust it in her love's duress;

Aucassin hath seen the gold
Shining bright in that dark hold,
Took the lock at her behest,
Kissed and placed it in his breast,
Then once more his eyes were wet
For Nicolette.

Now they say and tell and relate:

When Aucassin heard Nicolette say that she would fare into another country, he was filled with anger.

"Fair sweet friend," said he, "this be far from thee, for then wouldst thou have slain me. And the first man who saw thee, if so he might, would take thee forthwith and carry thee to his bed, and make thee his leman. Be sure that if thou wert found in any man's bed, save it be mine, I should not need a dagger to pierce my heart and slay me. Certes, no; wait would I not for a knife; but on the first wall or the nearest stone would I cast myself, and beat out my brains altogether. Better to die so foul a death as this, than know thee to be in any man's bed, save mine."

"Aucassin," said she, "I doubt that thou lovest me less than thy words; and that my love is fonder than thine."

"Alack," cried Aucassin, "fair sweet friend, how can it be that thy love should be so great? Woman cannot love man, as man loves woman; for woman's love is in the glance of her eye, and the blossom of her breast, and the tip of the toe of her foot; but the love of man is set deep in the hold of his heart, from whence it cannot be torn away."

Whilst Aucassin and Nicolette were thus at odds together, the town watch entered the street, bearing naked swords beneath their mantles, for Count Garin had charged them strictly, once she were taken, to put her to death. The warder from his post upon the tower marked their approach, and as they drew near heard them speaking of Nicolette, menacing her with death.

"God," said he, "it is great pity that so fair a damsel should be slain, and a rich alms should I give if I could warn her privily, and so she escape the snare; for

of her death Aucassin, my liege, were dead already, and truly this were a piteous case."

Now is sung:

Brave the warder, full of guile,
Straight he sought some cunning wile;
Sought and found a song betime,
Raised this sweet and pleasant rhyme.
"Lady of the loyal mind,
Slender, gracious, very kind,
Gleaming head and golden hair,
Laughing lips and eyes of vair!
Easy, Lady, 'tis to tell
Two have speech who love full well.
Yet in peril are they met,
Set the snare, and spread the net.
Lo, the hunters draw this way,
Cloaked, with privy knives, to slay.
Ere the huntsmen spie the chace
Let the quarry haste apace
And keep her well."

Now they say and tell and relate:

"Ah," said Nicolette, "may the soul of thy father and of thy mother find

sweetest rest, since in so fair and courteous a manner hast thou warned me. So God please, I will indeed keep myself close, and may He keep me too."

She drew the folds of her cloak about her, and crouched in the darkness of the pillars till the watch had passed beyond; then she bade farewell to Aucassin, and bent her steps to the castle wall. The wall was very ruinous, and mended with timber, so she climbed the fence, and went her way till she found herself between wall and moat. Gazing below, she saw that the fosse was very deep and perilous, and the maid had great fear.

"Ah, God," cried she, "sweet Creature, should I fall, my neck must be broken; and if I stay, to-morrow shall I be taken, and men will burn my body in a fire. Yet were it better to die, now, in this place, than to be made a show to-morrow in the market."

She crossed her brow, and let herself slide down into the moat, and when she reached the bottom, her fair feet and pretty hands, which had never learned

that they could be hurt, were so bruised and wounded that the blood came from them in places a many; yet knew she neither ill nor dolour because of the mightiness of her fear. But if with pain she had entered in, still more it cost her to issue forth. She called to mind that it were death to tarry, and by chance found there a stake of sharpened wood, which those within the keep had flung forth in their defence of the tower. With this she cut herself a foothold, one step above the other, till with extreme labour, she climbed forth from the moat. Now the forest lay but the distance of two bolts from a crossbow, and ran some thirty leagues in length and breadth; moreover, within were many wild beasts and serpents. She feared these greatly, lest they should do her a mischief; but presently she remembered that should men lay hands upon her, they would lead her back to the city to burn her at the fire.

Now is sung:

Nicolette the fair, the fond,
Climbed the fosse and won beyond;
There she kneeled her, and implored
Very help of Christ the Lord.
"Father, King of majesty,
Where to turn I know not, I.
So, within the woodland gloom
Wolf and boar and lion roam,
Fearful things, with rav'ning maw,
Rending tusk and tooth and claw.
Yet, if all adread I stay,
Men will come at break of day,
Treat me to their heart's desire,
Burn my body in the fire.
But by God's dear majesty
Such a death I will not die;
Since I die, ah, better then
Trust the boar than trust to men.
Since all's evil, men and beast,
Choose I the least."

Now they say and tell and relate:

Nicolette made great sorrow in such manner as you have heard. She com-

mended herself to God's keeping, and fared on until she entered the forest. She kept upon the fringes of the woodland, for dread of the wild beasts and reptiles ; and hiding herself within some thick bush, sleep overtook her, and she slept fast until six hours of the morn, when shepherds and herdsmen come from the city to lead their flocks to pasture between the wood and the river. The shepherds sat by a clear, sweet spring, which bubbled forth on the outskirts of the greenwood, and spreading a cloak upon the grass, set bread thereon. Whilst they ate together, Nicolette awoke at the song of the birds and the laughter, and hastened to the well.

"Fair children," said she, "God have you in His keeping."

"God bless you also," answered one who was more fluent of tongue than his companions.

"Fair child," said she, "do you know Aucassin, the son of Count Garin of this realm ?"

"Yes, we know him well."

"So God keep you, pretty boy," said she, "as you tell him that within this wood there is a fair quarry for his hunting; and if he may take her he would not part with one of her members for a hundred golden marks, nor for five hundred, nay, nor for aught that man can give."

Then looking upon her steadfastly, their hearts were troubled, the maid was so beautiful.

"Will I tell him?" cried he who was readier of word than his companions. "Woe to him who speaks of it ever, or tells Aucassin what you say. You speak not truth but faery, for in all this forest there is no beast—neither stag, nor lion, nor boar—one of whose legs would be worth two pence, or three at the very best, and you talk of five hundred marks of gold. Woe betide him who believes your story, or shall spread it abroad. You are a fay, and no fit company for such as us, so pass upon your road."

"Ah, fair child," answered she, "yet you will do as I pray. For this beast is

the only medicine that may heal Aucassin of his hurt. And I have here five sous in my purse, take them, and give him my message. For within three days must he hunt this chace, and if within three days he find not the quarry, never may he cure him of his wound."

"By my faith," said he, "we will take the money, and if he comes this way we will give him your message, but certainly we will not go and look for him."

"As God pleases," answered she.

So she bade farewell to the shepherds, and went her way.

Now is sung:

Nicolette as you heard tell
Bade the shepherd lads farewell,
Through deep woodlands warily
Fared she 'neath the leafy tree;
Till the grass-grown way she trod
Brought her to a forest road,
Whence, like fingers on a hand,
Forked sev'n paths throughout the land.
There she called to heart her love,
There bethought her she would prove

NICOLETTE builded her lodge very pretty it was, & very dainty

Whether true her lover's vows.
Plucked she then young sapling boughs,
Grasses, leaves that branches yield,
Oak shoots, lilies of the field;
Built a lodge with frond and flow'r,
Fairest mason, fairest bow'r!
Swore then by the truth of God
Should her lover come that road,
Nor for love of her who made
Dream a little in its shade,
'Spite his oath, no true love, he,
Nor fond heart, she.

Now they say and tell and relate:

Nicolette builded the lodge, as you have heard; very pretty it was and very dainty, and well furnished, both outside and in, with a tapestry of flowers and of leaves. Then she withdrew herself a little way from the bower, and hid within a thicket to spy what Aucassin would do. And the cry and the haro went through all the realm that Nicolette was lost. Some had it that she had stolen away, and others that Count Garin had done her to death. Whoever had joy thereof, Aucassin

had little pleasure. His father, Count Garin, brought him out of his prison, and sent letters to the lords and ladies of those parts bidding them to a very rich feast, so that Aucassin, his son, might cease to dote. When the feast was at its merriest, Aucassin leaned against the musicians' gallery, sad and all discomforted. No laugh had he for any jest, since she, whom most he loved, was not amongst the ladies set in hall. A certain knight marked his grief, and coming presently to him, said—

"Aucassin, of such fever as yours I, too, have been sick. I can give you good counsel if you are willing to listen."

"Sir knight," said Aucassin, "great thanks; good counsel, above all things, I would hear."

"Get to horse," said he; "take your pleasure in the woodland, amongst flowers and bracken and the songs of the birds. Perchance, who knows? you may hear some word of which you may be glad."

"Sir knight," answered Aucassin, "great thanks; this I will do."

He left the hall privily, and went down-

stairs to the stable where was his horse. He caused the charger to be saddled and bridled, then put foot in stirrup, mounted, and left the castle, riding till he entered the forest, and so by adventure came upon the well whereby the shepherd lads were sitting, and it was then about three hours after noon. They had spread a cloak upon the grass, and were eating their bread, with great mirth and jollity

Now is sung:

Round about the well were set
Martin, Robin, Esmeret;
Jolly shepherds, gaily met,
Frulin, Jack, and Aubriet.
Laughed the one, "God keep in ward
Aucassin, our brave young lord.
Keep besides the damsel fair,
Blue of eye and gold of hair,
Gave us wherewithal to buy
Cate and sheath knife presently,
Horn and quarter staff and fruit,
Shepherd's pipe and country flute;
God make him well."

Now they say and tell and relate:

When Aucassin marked the song of the herd-boys he called to heart Nicolette, his very sweet friend, whom he held so dear. He thought she must have passed that way, so he struck his horse with the spurs and came quickly to the shepherds.

"Fair children, God keep you."

"God bless you," replied he who was readier of tongue than his fellows.

"Fair children," said he, "tell over again the song that you told but now."

"We will not tell it," answered he who was more fluent of speech than the others; "sorrow be his who sings it to you, fair sir."

"Fair children," returned Aucassin, "do you not know me?"

"Oh yes, we know well that you are Aucassin, our young lord; but we are not your men; we belong to the Count."

"Fair children, sing me the song once more, I pray you!"

"By the Wounded Heart, what fine words! Why should I sing for you, if I have no wish to do so? Why, the richest man in all the land—saving the presence of Count Garin—would not dare to drive my sheep and oxen and cows from out his wheatfield or his pasture, for fear of losing his eyes. Wherefore, then, should I sing for you, if I have no wish to do so?"

"God keep you, fair children; yet you will do this thing for me. Take these ten sous that I have here in my purse."

"Sire, we will take the money; but I will not sing for you, since I have sworn not to do so; but I will tell it in plain prose, if such be your pleasure."

"As God pleases," answered Aucassin; "better the tale in prose than no story at all."

"Sire, we were in this glade between six and nine of the morn, and were breaking our bread by the well, just as we are doing now, when a girl came by, the loveliest thing in all the world, so fair that we doubted her a fay, and she brimmed our wood with light. She gave us money, and made a bargain with us that if you came here we would tell you that you must hunt in this forest, for in it is such a quarry that if you may take her you would not part with one of her members for five hundred silver marks, nor for aught that man can give. For in the quest is so sweet a salve that if you take her you shall be cured of your wound; and within three days must the chace be taken, for if she be not found by then, never will you see her more. Now go to your hunting if you will, and if you will not, let it go, for truly have I carried out my bargain with her."

"Fair children," cried Aucassin,

"enough have you spoken, and may God set me on her track."

Now is sung:

Aucassin's fond heart was moved
When this hidden word he proved
Sent him by the maid he loved.
Straight his charger he bestrode,
Bade farewell, and swiftly rode
Deep within the forest dim,
Saying o'er and o'er to him;
"Nicolette, so sweet, so good,
'Tis for you I search this wood;
Antlered stag nor boar I chase,
Hot I follow on your trace.
Slender shape and deep, blue eyes,
Dainty laughter, low replies,
Fledge the arrow in my heart.
Ah, to find you, ne'er to part!
Pray God give so fair an end,
Sister, sweet friend.

Now they say and tell and relate:

Aucassin rode through the wood in search of Nicolette, and the charger went right speedily. Do not think that the

spines and thorns were pitiful to him. Truly it was not so ; for his raiment was so torn that the least tattered of his garments could scarcely hold to his body, and the blood ran from his arms and legs and flanks in forty places, or at least in thirty, so that you could have followed after him by the blood which he left upon the grass. But he thought so fondly of Nicolette, his sweet friend, that he felt neither ill nor dolour. Thus all day long he searched the forest in this fashion, but might learn no news of her, and when it drew towards dusk he commenced to weep because he had heard nothing. He rode at adventure down an old grass-grown road, and looking before him saw a young man standing, such as I will tell you. Tall he was, and marvellously ugly and hideous. His head was big and blacker than smoked meat ; the palm of your hand could easily have gone between his two eyes ; he had very large cheeks and a monstrous flat nose with great nostrils ; lips redder than uncooked flesh ; teeth yellow and foul ; he was shod with shoes

and gaiters of bull's hide, bound about the leg with ropes to well above the knee ; upon his back was a rough cloak ; and he stood leaning on a huge club. Aucassin urged his steed towards him, but was all afeared when he saw him as he was.

" Fair brother, God keep you."

" God bless you too," said he.

" As God keeps you, what do you here ? "

" What is that to you ? " said he.

" Truly, naught," answered Aucassin. " I asked with no wish to do you wrong."

" And you, for what cause do you weep ? " asked the other, " and make such heavy sorrow ? Certainly, were I so rich a man as you are, not the whole world should make me shed a tear."

" Do you know me, then ? " said Aucassin.

" Yes, well I know you to be Aucassin, the son of the Count, and if you will tell me why you weep, well, then I will tell you what I do here."

" Certes," said Aucassin, " I will tell you with all my heart. I came this

morning to hunt in the forest, and with me a white greyhound, the swiftest in the whole world. I have lost him, and that is why I weep."

"Hear him," cried he, "by the Sacred Heart, and you make all this lamentation for a filthy dog! Sorrow be his who shall esteem you more. Why, there is not a man of substance in these parts who would not give you ten or fifteen or twenty hounds—if so your father wished—and be right glad to make you the gift. But for my part I have full reason to weep and cry aloud."

"And what is your grief, brother?"

"Sire, I will tell you. I was hired by a rich farmer to drive his plough, with a yoke of four oxen. Now three days ago, by great mischance, I lost the best of my bullocks, Roget, the very best ox in the plough. I have been looking for him ever since, and have neither eaten nor drunk for three days, since I dare not go back to the town, because men would put me into prison, as I have no money to pay for my loss. Of all the riches of the

world I have nought but the rags upon my back. My poor old mother, too, who had nothing but one worn-out mattress, why, they have taken that from under her, and left her lying on the naked straw. That hurts me more than my own trouble. For money comes and money goes ; if I have lost to-day, why, I may win to-morrow ; and I will pay for my ox when pay I can. Not for this will I wring my hands. And you—you weep aloud for a filthy cur. Sorrow take him who shall esteem you more."

"Certes, thou art a true comforter, fair brother, and blessed may you be. What is the worth of your bullock ?"

"Sire, the villein demands twenty sous for his ox. I cannot beat the price down by a single farthing."

"Hold out your hand," said Aucassin ; "take these twenty sous which I have in my purse, and pay for your ox."

"Sire," answered the hind, "many thanks, and God grant you find that for which you seek."

So they parted from each other, and

Aucassin rode upon his way. The night was beautiful and still, and so he fared along the forest path until he came to the seven cross-roads where Nicolette had builded her bower. Very pretty it was, and very dainty, and well furnished both outside and in, ceiling and floor, with arras and carpet of freshly plucked flowers; no sweeter habitation could man desire to see. When Aucassin came upon it he reined back his horse sharply, and the moonbeams fell within the lodge.

"Dear God," cried Aucassin, "here was Nicolette, my sweet friend, and this has she builded with her fair white hands. For the sweetness of the house and for love of her, now will I dismount, and here will I refresh me this night."

He withdrew his foot from the stirrup, and the charger was tall and high. He dreamed so deeply on Nicolette, his very sweet friend, that he fell heavily upon a great stone, and his shoulder came from its socket. He knew himself to be grievously wounded, but he forced him to do all that he was able, and fastened his

horse with the other hand to a thorn. Then he turned on his side, and crawled as best he might into the lodge. Looking through a crevice of the bower he saw the stars shining in the sky, and one brighter than all the others, so he began to repeat—

Now is sung:

Little Star I gaze upon
Sweetly drawing to the moon,
In such golden haunt is set
Love, and bright-haired Nicolette.
God hath taken from our war
Beauty, like a shining star.
Ah, to reach her, though I fell
From her Heaven to my Hell.
Who were worthy such a thing,
Were he emperor or king?
Still you shine, oh, perfect Star,
Beyond, afar.

Now they say and tell and relate:

When Nicolette heard Aucassin speak these words she hastened to him from where she was hidden near by. She

entered in the bower, and clasping her arms about his neck, kissed and embraced him straitly.

"Fair sweet friend, very glad am I to find you."

"And you, fair sweet friend, glad am I to meet."

So they kissed, and held each other fast, and their joy was lovely to see.

"Ah, sweet friend," cried Aucassin, "it was but now that I was in grievous pain with my shoulder, but since I hold you close I feel neither sorrow nor wound."

Nicolette searched his hurt, and perceived that the shoulder was out of joint. She handled it so deftly with her white hands, and used such skilful surgery, that by the grace of God (who loveth all true lovers) the shoulder came back to its place. Then she plucked flowers, and fresh grass, and green leafage, and bound them tightly about the setting with the hem torn from her shift, and he was altogether healed.

"Aucassin," said she, "fair sweet friend, let us take thought together as to what

must be done. If your father beats the wood to-morrow, and men take me, whatever may chance to you, certainly I shall be slain."

"Certes, fair sweet friend, the sorer grief would be mine. But so I may help, never shall you come to his hands."

So he mounted to horse, and setting his love before him, held her fast in his arms, kissing her as he rode, and thus they came forth to the open fields.

Now is sung:

Aucassin, that loving squire,
Dainty, fair to heart's desire,
Rode from out the forest dim
Clasping her he loved to him.
'Laced upon the saddle bow
There he kissed her chin and brow,
There embraced her, mouth and eyes.
But she spake him, sweetly wise;
"Love, a term to dalliance,
Since for us no home in France
Seek we Rome or far Byzance?"
"Sweet my love, all's one to me,
Dale or woodland, earth or sea;

WITH THE DAWN LOUD THEY HEARD THE SURGES ROAR
STOOD BY THE SEA

Nothing care I where we ride
So I hold you at my side."
So, enlaced, the lovers went,
Skirting town and battlement,
Rocky scaur, and quiet lawn;
Till one morning, with the dawn,
Broke the cliffs down to the shore,
Loud they heard the surges roar,
Stood by the sea.

Now they say and tell and relate:

Aucassin dismounted upon the sand, he and Nicolette together, as you have heard tell. He took his horse by the bridle, and his damsel by the hand, and walked along the beach. Soon they perceived a ship, belonging to merchants of those parts, sailing close by, so Aucassin made signs to the sailors, and presently they came to him. For a certain price they agreed to take them upon the ship, but when they had reached the open sea a great and marvellous storm broke upon the vessel, and drove them from land to land until they drew to a far-off country, and cast anchor in the port of the castle

of Torelore. Then they asked to what realm they had fared, and men told them that it was the fief of the King of Torelore. Then inquired Aucassin what manner of man was this king, and whether there was any war, and men answered—

"Yes, a mighty war."

So Aucassin bade farewell to the merchants, and they commended him to God. He belted his sword about him, climbed to horse, taking his love before him on the saddle bow, and went his way till he came to the castle. He asked where the King might be found, and was told that he was in child-bed.

"Where, then, is his wife?

And they answered that she was with the host, and had carried with her all the armed men of those parts. When Aucassin heard these things he marvelled very greatly. He came to the palace door and there dismounted, bidding Nicolette to hold the bridle. Then, making his sword ready, he climbed the palace stair, and searched until he came to the chamber where the King lay.

Now is sung:

Hot from searching, Aucassin
Found the room and entered in;
There before the couch he stayed
Where the King, alone, was laid,
Marked the King, and marked the bed,
Marked this lying-in, then said,
"*Fool, why doest thou this thing?*"
"*I'm a mother,*" *quoth the King:*
"*When my month is gone at length,*
And I come to health and strength,
Then shall I hear Mass once more
As my fathers did before,
Arm me lightly, take my lance,
Set my foe a right fair dance,
Where horses prance."

Now they say and tell and relate:

When Aucassin heard the King speak thus he took the linen from the bed, and flung it about the chamber. He saw a staff in the corner, so he seized it, returned to the bed, and beat the King so rudely therewith that he was near to die.

"Ha, fair sire," cried the King, "what

do you require of me? Are you mad that you treat me thus in my own house?"

"By the Sacred Heart," said Aucassin, "bad son of a shameless mother, I will strike with the sword if you do not swear to me that man shall never lie in childbed in your realm again."

He plighted troth, and when he was thus pledged, "Sire," required Aucassin, "bring me now where your wife is with the host."

"Sire, willingly," said the King.

He got to horse, and Aucassin mounted his, leaving Nicolette at peace in the Queen's chamber. The King and Aucassin rode at adventure until they came to where the Queen was set, and they found that the battle was joined with roasted crab-apples and eggs and fresh cheeses. So Aucassin gazed upon the sight and marvelled greatly.

Now is sung:

Aucassin hath drawn his rein
From the saddle stared amain,

Marked the set and stricken field,
Cheered the hearts that would not yield.
They had carried to the fight
Mushrooms, apples baked aright,
And for arrows, if you please,
Pelted each with good fresh cheese.
He who muddied most the ford
Bore the prize in that award.
Aucassin, the brave, the true,
Watched these deeds of derring do,
Laughed loudly too.

Now they say and tell and relate:

When Aucassin saw this strange sight he went to the King and asked of him—

"Sire, are these your foes?"

"Yea, sire," answered the King.

"And would you that I should avenge you on them?"

"Yea," answered he, "right willingly."

So Aucassin took sword in hand, and throwing himself in the *mêlée*, struck fiercely on the right and on the left, and slew many. When the King saw the death that Aucassin dealt he snatched at his bridle and cried—

"Hold, fair sire, deal not with them so cruelly."

"What," said Aucassin, "was it not your wish that I should avenge you on your enemies?"

"Sire," replied the King, "too ready is such payment as yours. It is not our custom, nor theirs, to fight a quarrel to the death."

Thereon the foemen fled the field.

The King and Aucassin returned in triumph to the castle of Torelore, and the men of the country persuaded the King that he should cast Aucassin forth from the realm, and give Nicolette to his son, for she seemed a fair woman of high lineage. When Nicolette heard thereof she had little comfort, so began to say—

Now is sung:

Simple folk, and simple King,
Deeming maid so slight a thing.
When my lover finds me sweet,
Sweetly shapen, brow to feet,
Then know I such dalliance,
No delight of harp, or dance,

Sweetest tune, or fairest mirth,
All the play of all the earth
Seems aught of worth.

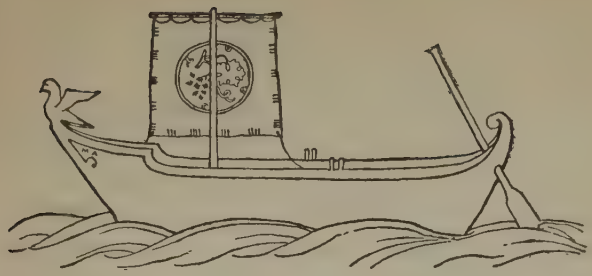
Now they say and tell and relate:

Aucassin abode in the castle of Torelore in ease and great delight, having with him Nicolette his sweet friend, whom he loved so well. Whilst his days passed in so easy and delightful a manner a great company of Saracens came in galleys over-sea and beset the castle, and presently took it by storm. They gathered together the spoil, and bore off the townsfolk, both men and women, into captivity. Amongst these were seized Nicolette and Aucassin, and having bound Aucassin, both hands and feet, they flung him into one vessel, and bestowed Nicolette upon another. Thereafter a great tempest arose at sea, and drove these galleys apart. The ship whereon Aucassin lay bound, drifted idly, here and there, on wind and tide, till by chance she went ashore near by the castle of Beaucaire, and the men of that part hurrying to the wreck, found Aucassin

and knew him again. When the men of Beaucaire saw their lord they had much joy, for Aucassin had lived at the castle of Torelore in all ease for three full years, and his father and his mother were dead. They brought him to the castle of Beaucaire, and knelt before him ; so held he his realm in peace.

Now is sung:

Aucassin hath gained Beaucaire,
Men have done him homage there;
Holds he now in peace his fief,
Castellan and count and chief.
Yet with heaviness and grief
Goeth he in that fair place,
Lacking love and one sweet face;
Grieving more for one bright head
Than he mourneth for his dead.
"Dearest love, and lady kind,
Treasure I may never find,
God hath never made that strand
Far o'er sea or long by land,
Where I would not seek such prize
And merchandize."



Now they say and tell and relate:

Now leave we Aucassin and let us tell of Nicolette. The ship which carried Nicolette belonged to the King of Carthage, and he was her father, and she had twelve brothers, all princes or kings in the land. When they saw the beauty of the girl, they made much of her, and bore her in great reverence, and questioned her straitly as to her degree, for certainly she seemed to them a very gracious lady and of high lineage. But she could not tell them aught thereof, for she was but a little child when men sold her into captivity. So the oarsmen rowed until the galley cast anchor beneath the city of

Carthage, and when Nicolette gazed on the battlements and the country round about, she called to mind that there had she been cherished, and from thence borne away when but an unripe maid; yet she was not snatched away so young but that she could clearly remember that she was the daughter of the King of Carthage, and once was nourished in the city.

Now is sung:

Nicolette, that maid demure,
Set her foot on alien shore;
Marked the city fenced with walls,
Gazed on palaces and halls.
Then she sighed, "Ah, little worth
All the pomp of all the earth,
Since the daughter of a king,
Come of Sultan's blood, they bring
Stripped to market, as a slave.
Aucassin, true heart and brave,
Sweet thy love upon me steals,
Urges, clamours, pleads, appeals;
Would to God that peril past
In my arms I held you fast;
Would to God that in this place

We were stayed in one embrace,
Fell your kisses on my face,
My dear, my fere."

Now they say and tell and relate:

When the King of Carthage heard Nicolette speak in this wise he put his arms about her neck.

"Fair sweet friend," said he, "tell me truly who you are, and be not esmayed of me."

"Sire," answered she, "truly am I daughter to the King of Carthage, and was stolen away when but a little child, full fifteen years ago."

When they heard her say this thing they were assured that her words were true, so they rejoiced greatly, and brought her to the palace in such pomp as became the daughter of a king. They sought to give her some king of those parts as husband and baron, but she had no care to marry. She stayed in the palace three or four days, and considered in her mind by what means she might flee and seek Aucassin. So she obtained a viol, and

learned to play thereon ; and when on a certain day they would have given her in marriage to a rich king among the Paynim, she rose at night and stole away secretly, wandering until she came to the seaport, where she lodged with some poor woman in a house near the shore. There, by means of a herb, she stained her head and face, so that her fairness was all dark and discoloured ; and having made herself coat and mantle, shirt and hose, she equipped her in the guise of a minstrel. Then, taking her viol, she sought out a sailor, and persuaded him sweetly to grant her a passage in his ship. They hoisted sail, and voyaged over the rough seas until they came to the land of Provence ; and Nicolette set foot on shore, carrying her viol, and fared playing through the country, until she came to the castle of Beaucaire, in the very place where Aucassin was.

Now is sung :

'Neath the keep of strong Beaucaire
On a day of summer air,

At his pleasure, Aucassin
Sat with baron, friend and kin.
Then upon the scent of flow'rs,
Song of birds, and golden hours,
Full of beauty, love, regret,
Stole the dream of Nicolette,
Came the tenderness of years;
So he drew apart in tears.
Then there entered to his eyes
Nicolette, in minstrel guise,
Touched the viol with the bow,
Sang as I will let you know.
"Lords and ladies, list to me,
High and low, of what degree;
Now I sing, for your delight,
Aucassin, that loyal knight,
And his fond friend, Nicolette.
Such the love betwixt them set
When his kinsfolk sought her head
Fast he followed where she fled.
From their refuge in the keep
Paynims bore them o'er the deep.
Nought of him I know to end.
But for Nicolette, his friend,
Dear she is, desirable,
For her father loves her well;

Famous Carthage owns him king,
Where she has sweet cherishing.
Now, as lord he seeks for her,
Sultan, Caliph, proud Emir.
But the maid of these will none,
For she loves a dansellon,
Aucassin, who plighted troth.
Sworn has she some pretty oath
Ne'er shall she be wife or bride,
Never lie at baron's side
Be he denied."

Now they say and tell and relate:

When Aucassin heard Nicolette sing in this fashion he was glad at heart, so he drew her aside, and asked—

"Fair sweet friend," said Aucassin, "know you naught of this Nicolette, whose ballad you have sung?"

"Sire, truly, yes; well I know her for the most loyal of creatures, and as the most winning and modest of maidens born. She is daughter to the King of Carthage, who took her when Aucassin also was taken, and brought her to the city of Carthage, till he knew for certain that

she was his child, whereat he rejoiced greatly. Any day he would give her for husband one of the highest kings in all Spain; but rather would she be hanged or burned than take him, however rich he be."

"Ah, fair sweet friend," cried the Count Aucassin, "if you would return to that country and persuade her to have speech with me here, I would give you of my riches more than you would dare to ask of me or to take. Know that for love of her I choose not to have a wife, however proud her race, but I stand and wait; for never will there be wife of mine if it be not her, and if I knew where to find her I should not need to grope blindly for her thus."

"Sire," answered she, "if you will do these things I will go and seek her for your sake, and for hers too; because to me she is very dear."

He pledged his word, and caused her to be given twenty pounds. So she bade him farewell, and he was weeping for the sweetness of Nicolette. And when she saw his tears—

"Sire," said she, "take it not so much to heart; in so short a space will I bring her to this town, and you shall see her with your eyes."

When Aucassin knew this he rejoiced greatly. So she parted from him, and fared in the town to the house of the Viscountess, for the Viscount, her godfather, was dead. There she lodged, and opened her mind fully to the lady on all the business; and the Viscountess recalled the past, and knew well that it was Nicolette whom she had cherished. So she caused the bath to be heated and made her take her ease for fully eight days. Then Nicolette sought a herb that was called celandine, and washed herself therewith, and became so fair as she had never been before. She arrayed her in a rich silken gown from the lady's goodly store; and seated herself in the chamber on a rich stuff of broidered sendal; then she whispered the dame, and begged her to fetch Aucassin, her friend. This she did. When she reached the palace, lo, Aucassin in tears, making great sorrow for the

She arrayed her in a rich silken gown from the Lady's goodly store

long tarrying of Nicolette, his friend; and the lady called to him, and said—

"Aucassin, behave not so wildly; but come with me, and I will show you that thing you love best in all the world; for Nicolette, your sweet friend, is here from a far country to seek her love."

So Aucassin was glad at heart.

Now is sung:

When he learned that in Beaucaire
Lodged his lady, sweet and fair,
Aucassin arose, and came
To her hostel, with the dame:
Entered in, and passed straightway
To the chamber where she lay.
When she saw him, Nicolette
Had such joy as never yet;
Sprang she lightly to her feet
Swiftly came with welcome meet.
When he saw her, Aucassin
Oped both arms, and drew her in,
Clasped her close in fond embrace,
Kissed her eyes and kissed her face.
In such greeting sped the night,
Till, at dawning of the light,

Aucassin, with pomp most rare,
Crowned her Countess of Beaucaire.
Such delight these lovers met,
Aucassin and Nicolette.
Length of days and joy did win,
Nicolette and Aucassin,
Endeth song and tale I tell
With marriage bell.

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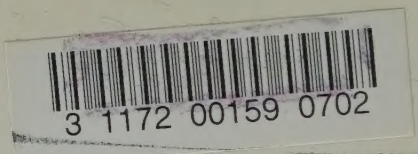
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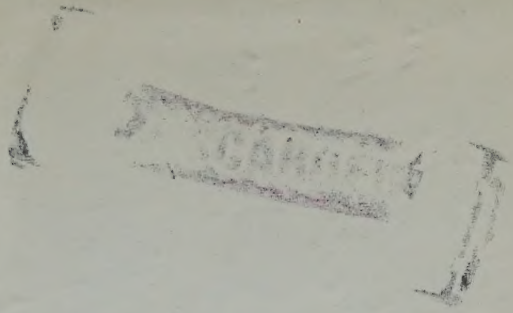

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